

Lovell (Health) House  
4616 Dundee Drive  
Los Angeles  
Los Angeles County  
California

HABS No. CA-1936

HABS  
CAL,  
19-LOSAN,  
66-

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Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
Washington, D. C. 20240

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

LOVELL (HEALTH) HOUSE

HABS No. CA-1936

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CAL,  
19-LOSAN,  
666-

Location: 4616 Dundee Drive, Los Angeles, Los Angeles County, California.

Present Owner: Dr. and Mrs. M. M. Topper.

Present Occupant: Dr. and Mrs. Topper.

Present Use: Residence.

Significance: The Lovell (Health) House is a prime example of residential architecture where technology creates the environment. The house is constructed of a light steel framework, filled with standard window components. All parts of the structure were shop fabricated and transported to the steep hillside site where the structural skeleton was erected in just forty hours. Commonly called the Health House because the client was a naturopath, the building complex reveals Neutra's beliefs concerning health and architectural design.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1928-29.
2. Architect: Richard Neutra.
3. Original and subsequent owners:

1929-1951 Dr. Philip N. and Leah Lovell.

1951-1961 Leo Goldberg.

1961-1969 Dr. M. M. Topper.

Legal Description: Book 5588, p. 31, Tract 4276, Parcel 10 code area 0004.

4. Builder, contractor, suppliers: Neutra, the architect, contracted with sub-contractors for construction. A. G. Prichard of Los Angeles was the cement and plaster contractor, and Gaston W. Duncan was the contractor for the lath work.
5. Original plans and construction: Plans are in the office of Richard Neutra, 2379 Glendale Avenue, Los Angeles (1969). Old photographs are also in the possession of the architect. With the death of Richard Neutra, the plans and photographs will then be held by his son, Dion Neutra, Architect, at the same address.

There are also records of the house in the Special Collections Department of the Powell Library, UCLA, Los Angeles.

The house is built on a three-level hillside scheme with entrance from the street at the top level. The entrance is into a hall with an open two-story stairwell with a two-story high glazing on the south. On the top level is a den, off the entrance hall, and bedrooms. On the middle level are the living room-library, dining room, kitchen and servants' bedrooms. On the lowest level are a pool, laundry and equipment rooms.

The structural system is a steel filagree of I-section columns and trusses with open web joists. The skin is of 1-1/4" gunite.

6. Alterations and additions: Aside from glazing of some porches, and general repairs, there have been no major alterations. All repair work has been done through the office of Richard Neutra, the original architect.

Prepared by: Esther McCoy  
Summer 1969

## PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

### A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The Lovell (Health) House, designed by Richard J. Neutra in 1928, and built in 1928-29, is a prime example of residential architecture where technology creates the environment. The house is constructed of a light steel framework, filled with standard window components. All parts of the structure were shop fabricated and transported to the steep hillside site--the structural skeleton being erected in just forty hours. The ribbons of wall are of thin concrete sprayed against expanded metal backed by insulation panels acting as forms. The balconies are suspended from the roof frame. Commonly called the Health House because the client was a naturopath, the building complex reveals Neutra's beliefs concerning health and architectural design.
2. Condition of fabric: Fair to poor. There are areas of deterioration, especially at the bases of the steel columns and in some of the concrete surfaces, which are cracked. In general the maintenance of the building has been lax.

### B. Detailed Description of the Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: 78'-9" x 42'-0" for the basic plan. There are projecting elements which add to these dimensions creating an overall package measuring 130' x 42'. There are fifteen bays

from east to west, and eight bays from north to south. The bay module is 5'-1-1/2" based on a 4" width of column and 4'-10-1/8" width of standard triple steel casement. There are three stories plus a partial basement. The entry to the house is on the top level (designated the third floor), and the building steps down the hill.

2. Foundations: The foundations are of 12' thick reinforced concrete, exposed on the downhill side of the house. The concrete foundations act as retaining walls on the steep hillside site. Where exposed, the concrete is painted white.
3. Wall construction, finish, color: The walls are of 1-1/4" dense concrete sprayed (shot form air-compression gun) onto expanded metal which is backed up by insulation panels acting as forms. The rough surface is painted white.
4. Structural system: The building has a light steel framework composed of 4" posts (I-sections) placed 5'-1-1/2" on center. These support I-sections of various depths (from 4" to 10") which in turn carry the open web joists (bar trusses). All spandrel to column connections are stiffened with 12" wingplates to secure further earthquake resistance. The bar trusses are electrically welded. All exposed steel is painted battleship grey.
5. Porches, stoops, bulkheads: The entry terrace is situated at the east end of the building at the top level; about 4'-6" below street level. This has a concrete surface. There are several screened sleeping porches located on the top level. These spaces are still there, but they were enclosed at some undesignated date. One was located in the center of the north facade (this porch still maintains its original function). One porch was centered on the south wall and has been enclosed. There were two others on the west facade, one centered and the other in the northwest corner.

The former large screened porch situated at the NW corner of the living room floor level has been enclosed and is used as a combination study and dining room. A large terrace, accessible from the living room and the library, is located just south and one level below the entry terrace. It has a concrete surface and opens to the grass lawn on the south. There is a small porch located on the center of the south facade, accessible from the living room.

At the lowest level (designated the swimming pool level) the former nursery porch has been enclosed and a patio placed on the north and NW sides of the house. The swimming pool is placed on the "Belle Vue" terrace at the SW corner, and is partially

covered by the house above. The "Belle Vue" is constructed on concrete. It opens to the south and affords a magnificent view of the city.

6. Chimneys: A plain (concrete construction) plastered chimney, 4'-7" high, is located 3'-6" back from the south edge of the roof (the overall dimensions of this chimney are 5'-4" x 3'-2"), and 22'-6" from the east edge.

The incinerator stack is 2'-0" high and is situated 5'-6" back from the north edge and 26'-0" from the west edge.

7. Openings:

- a. Doorways and doors: The main entry is centered on the east facade and is a wood flush door (painted black). In addition, flush doors or doors with a glass panel over a solid panel open onto the screen porches. Glass doors (with steel frames) open from the living room and library to the SE corner terrace (this is a modern door). The doors along the north side of the house have glass panels (4 panels in the door from the guest bedroom to the lawn; one glass panel above a solid panel in the door from the kitchen to the outside; and from laundry room and swimming pool passage to the exterior).
- b. Windows: All windows of the house follow the 4'-10-1/2" width for the standard triple light windows which have casements to the sides and a fixed glass panel in the center. This window type (the original variety) is used wherever the original drawings specified window enclosures. The later windows, which replaced the screen panels, have slightly differing details (the casements are hinged at the extremities rather than at the center). The heights vary and some have fixed glass panels below the triple light configurations.

Ultra-violet ray glass was used; glass wainscots are opaque.

8. Roof, shape and covering: The composition roof has a slight slope down from north to south. Projections through the roof include the chimney and stack mentioned above and an 8'-10" (N to S) x 7'-7" (E to W) skylight located 11'-8" back from the south edge and 13'-9" from the west edge, and a vent stack. There is the remaining portion of a pipe structure running east to west near the north side of the building. The rest of the original roof apparatus has been removed.

A parapet masks the slope of the roof on the west and east sides of the house. The top of the wall to the north and south carry slightly above the roof, the top of the wall on the north side being 2'-3" higher than the south.

C. Detailed Description of the Interior:

1. Plans:

- a. Third floor: Access to the house is across the entrance terrace at the east end of the building. The entry hall overlooks the living room to the left as one enters the house. Directly ahead lies the sleeping quarters, accessible from a hallway. Living room #2, with its sleeping porch, lies to the right (north side of house), #3 is also to the north (with a bathroom separating it from #2), #3 is situated in the SW corner of the level. It has its own bath and dressing room complex just to the south of it. A study is located at the center of the south wall, with a sleeping porch and sunbath to its south. The stairs from this level (designated the third floor) to the living room are located in the SE corner of the house. Another stairway from the NW corner of the entrance terrace and the north sleeping deck gives access to the guest rooms and kitchen on the lower level.
- b. Second Floor: The south side of the house on the second floor down (designated the living room floor) is one clear space extending about 56' from the east to west. Arrival from the upper level brings one directly into the living room. To the right (east) is located a small library. To the far left (SW corner) is the dining room. This room is really an extension of the living room space but with a slightly lower ceiling. It is now used as a part of the living room. In the NW corner is a room which was formerly a screened porch and is now a dining room and study. The kitchen is situated at the center of the north facade. Two guest rooms are located in the NE corner (below the entrance terrace). Access to the lowest level is via stairs located below the main stairway.
- c. First floor: The lowest level (designated the Swimming Pool Floor) is reached via stairs located below the main stairway in the SE corner of the house. The stairs open to the outside terrace adjacent to the pool. The pool is partially under the house, its western end opens to the sky. It is placed on a terrace called the Belle Vue, which opens to the south. Along the north side of the house are located the service elements. In the NW corner is a glass enclosed room which was originally an open nursery porch.

Just east of this room is a passage which links the Belle Vue with the outside to the north. At the center of the north wall is a shower-bath area, serving the users of the pool. The laundry room is also located at the north center and has access only from the north exterior. The remainder on this level (i.e., the portion to the east) is unexcavated.

An exterior stair on the exterior of the house (south side) gives access to the utility room located under the Belle Vue.

2. Stairways:

The main stairway linking the third floor to the living room floor is located in the SE corner of the house. There are risers, 6-2/3" high with 11" treads. The stairway is a dog-leg type, turning to the right as one descends. A secondary stairway in the NE corner of the upper level has 16 risers 8" high with 10" treads. This stair has a straight run for 14 risers, landing in the hall. The remaining 2 risers are to the right and finish at the living room floor level. A service stair in the NE corner of the entrance terrace and the living room floor has 22 risers, 8" high with 10" treads. It provides access from the street to the hall on the living room floor, and has a straight run with one landing. The stairway providing access from the living room floor to the swimming pool floor is located under the main stairway. There are 19 risers, 7-1/2" high, north side of the house is a stairway which leads from the kitchen to the patio level and the laundry room. There are 15 risers, 8" high with 10" treads. It has an L-plan with the turn to the left. A stairway of straight run with 17 risers, 8" high and 10" treads gives access to the utility room below the Belle Vue.

3. Flooring: The floors in the house are either hardwood, cement, or linoleum in the following distribution: 3/8" select oak hardwood flooring in the third floor, living room #4, the hall, the study, and the entry, and in the two guest rooms on the living room floor. Maple flooring is used in the dining and living rooms. Linoleum flooring is used in the third floor living rooms #2 and #3, the bathrooms, and the dressing room, and in the kitchen, pantry, and hall of the Living Room Floor. Cement floors are used for the porch floors, the terraces, and the library. All floors at the Swimming Pool Floor are cement.
4. Wall and ceiling finishes: Smooth plaster over metal lath is used for all interior surfaces; rough plaster is used for exterior surfaces.

5. Openings: Doors: Flush doors are used throughout the house. The major doors are 2'-6" by 6'-8". Some of the minor doors are only 2'-0" wide. The doors were originally painted black or received a natural color finish.
6. Decorative features and trim: The house is devoid of decorative features normally associated with houses of the period. The decoration is a part of the technology used. The lines are clean and simple. The use of chrome surfaces adds to the brilliance of the interior, and the large planes of white are relieved by panels of glossy black-painted surfaces of the closets, etc. There are several pieces of noteworthy built-in furniture. Along the north wall of the living room is a built-in couch. Book shelves are building along the north wall of the library and a small couch is built along a portion of the library's east wall. All these pieces are finished in glossy black enamel.

On the third floor there is a built-in couch along the north and west walls of the study. Closets and cabinets are built into the dressing room; these pieces are finished in a natural wood color.

7. Hardware: Standard hardware is used in the house. Some concealed hardware, as well as standard butt hinges and door knobs, are used. The hardware for the windows is a part of the standard units employed.

All hardware and metal parts are chromium nickel.

8. Mechanical Equipment:

- a. Heating: There is a fireplace stack at about the center of the south wall with fireplaces in the study, the living room and the Belle Vue.

The heating system is a centralized, forced-air system with the heating plant in the basement. There is no air-cooling; good natural ventilation usually being provided by breezes through the house.

- b. Lighting: Modern electric lighting was used; the fixtures are original. A chrome lighting trough is suspended from the living room ceiling near the north wall. Recessed fixtures are located in the dining room ceiling. An automobile headlamp is carefully placed in the half wall of the main stairway. Natural lighting is found in the master bathroom on the third floor. This is reinforced by concealed lighting above the glass soffit which fills the ceiling.



- c. Plumbing fixtures: Standard fixtures are used, the originals still in place. Plumbing in the kitchen has been slightly altered.

D. Site and Surroundings:

1. General setting: The Lovell (Health) House lot is located at the end of Dundee Drive, adjacent to the southern boundary of Griffith Park. The original lot was almost wedge shaped and situated between Dundee Drive on the east and Aberdeen on the SW. The drop was from 796'-6" to about 695' at Aberdeen. The lot originally measured 100' on the north (facing Griffith Park), 278' on the west, 80' on Aberdeen (SW), 200' on the south, and about 200' on the east (Dundee Drive). The lower portion of the site was sold and another house built on it.

The house is instead about 15' forward of the north property line at the top of the hill. The garage is at the top of the site at the east property line. The location of the building complex affords a magnificent view of the city to the SW.

2. Historic landscape design: The original plans located a tennis court downhill from the house and garage. Parts of the retaining wall for the courts, a part of a children's theatre, and a system of steps, walks, and ramps leading to it still exist. The tennis court was removed when that portion of the lot was sold. The grounds between the house and tennis courts were terraced with retaining walls. Dense plantings were limited to the rear portions of the site (opposite the direction of view), although the downhill parts have become somewhat overgrown.
3. Outbuildings: The garage structure, designed by Neutra, is located at the east property line about 60' south of the house. Originally the garage was intended to be of one level only (as seen in the original drawings dated April 6, 1928), but as executed it includes a lower level study. The building follows the same modular design as the house.

Prepared by: Robert C. Giebner  
Project Supervisor  
Southern California Project II, HABS  
July 24, 1969

(This report is based on field investigation, review of photographic records, and the study of the original drawings by Neutra. The working drawings are dated April 6, 1928. The building permit was granted in November 1928 and the completion permit was granted October 23, 1929).

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Original architectural drawings: See Item A, no. 5 in Part I.  
Historic Information, supra.

B. Bibliography:

R. Neutra, Neues Bauen in der Welt: Amerika, Schroll, Vienna, 1930.

R. Neutra, Architecture of Social Concern, Todtman, Brazil, 1948.

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W. Boesiger, Richard Neutra, Giursberger, Zurich, 1951.

B. Zevi, Richard Neutra, II Balcone, Milan, Italy, 1954.

E. McCoy, Richard Neutra, Braziller, New York, 1964.

Encyclopedia of Modern Architecture, Abrams, New York, 1964.

Gebhard-Winter, A Guide to the Architecture of Southern California,  
Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1965.

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

This project was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey in cooperation with the Southern California Coordinating Committee for Historic Preservation. This is the HABS-Southern California Project II, and was undertaken in 1969.